

i was dreaming while i drove by lamphouse

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

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Summary:

It is November 2nd, 1987, the middle-of-nowhere, Indiana, and Mike Wheeler is sitting in a tree with the girl she has a crush on. It's pretty much the most excruciating experience of her entire life, and that's including the time Dustin accidentally dropped a giant rock on her foot in the second grade.

i was dreaming while i drove

Author's Note:

- For [knoxoverstreet](#).

[kindofmotion](#) asked: no. 33 for our lesbian butch and femme daughters El and Mike thank u

from *a softer world* [429](#): "I cannot help but notice we are sitting-in-a-tree. So, you know, maybe we could think of something to do... verb-wise. (I want us to gerund, essentially.)"

El Hopper is different.

For starters, her name is El. Not short for anything, just... El. She wears a lot of dark clothes and old plaid shirts and has a bit of an attitude, but has no tolerance for any of the bullying people who like her usually occupy themselves with. She rarely talks, and when she does it's in weirdly serious short sentences. No one knows anything about her other than that her dad is the new police chief, just moved back from Chicago, and that she's ridiculously good at dodgeball. El Hopper shows up on the first day of tenth grade with a beat up backpack and an omnipresent Walkman and Mike Wheeler immediately falls in love.

Maybe it's because she's watched too many teen movies (all Nancy's fault), maybe it's because she's been stuck with the same set of kids since kindergarten, but Mike can't help but think that her life hinges on this moment, that El is the mysterious and beautiful stranger who appears one day to take Mike out of her boring existence and sweep her away into adventure and romance. She dares to tell Will this one day, a few weeks after El arrives in their lives, and Will smiles kindly in his way, but Mike can tell he finds it at least a little stupid.

Mike agrees. It is stupid. It's stupid the way she daydreams in the direction of the back of El's curly head, thinks of El when Nancy won't stop playing her shitty pop music, feels the slightest bit cold walking home and immediately imagines how much warmer she'd be

wearing El's black denim jacket. It's stupid, which is why Mike will never tell anyone else as long as she lives.

But Mike is going to explode if she doesn't tell anyone, so Will is her only solace. He sits patiently with Mike in her basement, sketching random objects around the room as Mike bemoans how cute El was in her cuffed overalls that day.

"I mean, how does she even do that?" She throws her hands up and accidentally punches the floor. "Ow!"

Will looks up from his notebook on the opposite sofa, part amused and part concerned. "Did you forget you were upside down again?"

"Shut up." Mike flips over and glares at him briefly. "I just don't get how she made cuffed overalls look good. It's ridiculous."

Turning back to his paper, Will says offhand, "I liked her socks."

Mike sits up abruptly. "What."

"Her socks." Will continues drawing, unperturbed. "They had comets and stars on them, I thought they were neat."

Mike can't help the way her eyes automatically narrow. "Do you have a crush on El?"

Will's pencil stutters to a halt. "No!" Judging by his blush, either he's a really bad liar or— Well, okay, Mike knows he's a really bad liar, but that doesn't seem to be the current issue, so she flops back onto her sofa.

"Good. I'd feel really bad if I had to kick your ass."

She stares at the ceiling restlessly. The thought of anyone else being... *interested* in El, even her best friend, just feels wrong. Not even in a possessive way, because she's so scared of anything approaching that kind of thing and El is amazing, Mike would never want to tie her down or anything, and they're fifteen for crying out loud, but she just feels like they're perfect for each other and it would be really cool to hold El's hand.

Plus, she *would* feel bad if she had to kick Will's ass. He's her best friend, and also super scrawny.

"So what are you gonna do about it?" Will asks after a while, glancing up from his drawing again.

Mike's confusion stops her racing thoughts. "Do about it?"

"You know..." Will blushes a little and waves ineffectively. "Are you going to ask her out, or...?"

"Are you kidding me?" Her mind can't even comprehend the concept. "No way. She's so..."

"Intimidating?" Will offers.

"Pretty."

Will looks at her knowingly until she flips him off, at which point he laughs and asks, "So you're not going to roll to seduce the knight?"

She throws a pillow at him and he laughs again as he ducks. "I wasn't kidding when I said I would kick your ass. And besides, why am I not the knight?"

"Because she is," Mike says. "It's like... you're Princess Leia and she's Han Solo."

Will deserves that second pillow to the face and Mike will stand by that. He's good at keeping secrets, though, so she trusts him to not blab to the others. She's not embarrassed or anything (well, maybe a little, El is just so cool...) but they're not the greatest with that kind of stuff.

Don't get her wrong, Mike loves Lucas and Dustin, but they're kinda assholes. They make fun, and it's great, usually, but she doesn't need that right now. It's hard enough to not freak out whenever El has to talk to her without the two of them nudging her in the ribs and waggling their eyebrows at her.

Will, though... He's a good confidante, and a kind listener. He's a good friend. His only failing is that sometimes he's so good of a friend

that he forgets that not everyone else is.

Since starting high school the four of them have taken to eating lunch in the usually abandoned art room. Lucas and Will were against it at first, but once Mike and Dustin won over Will with the promise of the good colored pencils they had a majority. Once Will befriended the art teacher, they even got to use her record player and collection. All in all, it was a pretty sweet setup, and definitely made up for the fact that they were only there because the alternative was the hellscape that was Hawkins High's cafeteria.

The context doesn't matter, but they're sitting around listening to Ms. Pound's Tears For Fears album at Will's request (because Jonathan keeps telling him to always widen his horizons) when Will accidentally says it.

"Oh yeah, Mike, like you and El."

Mike immediately starts glaring as hard as she can at Will, but the damage is done.

"What?!" Dustin almost spits his chocolate milk. When he swallows, he blurts, "You like El?"

"Shut up!" Mike glances at the open door and the hallway beyond.

"Of course she does," Lucas says as if he'd known the entire time and definitely didn't just see it. "She always stutters when they're paired up for Biology."

"Shut up!" Mike says again, just a little more furtive. She really should've made sure to close the door.

Dustin nudges her. "Maybe she likes you back."

Mike restrains herself to only shoving him at medium strength.

"Seriously!" He continues. "You don't know, she never talks, maybe she's really into you!"

"You've gotta be fucking kidding me."

"Yeah!" Lucas adds. Will nods in agreement and Mike rolls her eyes to hide the nervous feeling in her stomach at the thought.

How could El, of all people, have a crush on Mike Wheeler, president of the AV Club, Dungeon Master extraordinaire, pep band section leader, and secret Cyndi Lauper fan? El, who owns at least three leather jackets? El, who probably only listens to bands Mike has never heard of? El, who once slammed a kid's face into his lunch tray because he tried to trip Will?

God, she had it bad. Mike dropped her head onto the table and groaned. If the universe had any sense of fairness it would take her out of her misery right now before someone infinitely cooler than Mike swooped up her love interest and the real movie started.

Dustin shrugs and steals her root beer. "I'm just saying. If you never ask, you'll never know. It's your funeral, dude."

"Whatever. It's not a big deal." Mike sits up and glares at Dustin as she takes back her soda. "Besides, she's not as hot as Will's mom in high school, right?"

It has the exact reaction she was going for as Will reflexively covers his ears and yelps senselessly over Dustin and Lucas's enthusiastic agreement.

"Your mom was hot, dude," Dustin points out.

"Don't!"

Mike sits back and lets them argue around her, content that everyone's attention has wandered from her planet sized crush on El. Everyone but her, of course, because she's cursed or something to be forever dwelling on the butterflies she gets when El looks at her in the intense way she looks at just about everyone.

One Thursday in November, Mike is doodling in the corners of her notebook and planning the party's next campaign when the phone on her nightstand rings. Probably Will calling to ask if he should bring over soda with him tonight or something. She tilts her chair back enough to pick up the receiver without looking up from her notes.

"Yo, dweeblord, are you coming over tonight or what?"

"Mike."

Oh shit.

"El!" Mike tries not to shout into the receiver, but she fails a little. At least she manages not to tip her chair over completely. "Hey, hi, how's it going, what's up?" She's really glad El isn't actually there because she can't help but grimace.

"My dad wants me to make friends," El continues all crinkly through the phone. "Do you want to hang out?"

Mike tries not to trip over the cord as she sprints to the mirror on the opposite wall. Day two overalls, alright, that's fine. The left cuff of her sweatshirt is coming apart a little and the red is so faded it's almost white and her hair is doing that stupid thing where a chunk of it sticks out of the side of her head, but she hasn't messed up her eyeliner yet today.

"Yeah! Uh, I'll meet you at Market and Briarwood? That's about halfway between our houses."

"Okay."

Mike is dialing Will's number the second El hangs up.

"Pick up, pick up, pick up." Mike bounces in place as the phone keeps ringing and ringing and the second it stops she shouts, "Will!"

"Uh, Mike?"

Mike freezes in place. "Oh! Mrs. Byers! Uh, is Will there?"

A brief shuffling, then another, "Mike?"

"Will!" Like someone hit unpause, Mike is off again like a shot, scrambling around the room. "Socks, I need socks."

"Do you... not have any?"

"No!" Mike drops to the floor so she can pull on the nearest two socks and hold the phone to her shoulder at the same time. "I have socks, I just need to put them on."

"Do you need... help with that?"

"Bite me." The socks don't match, but it's fine, she'll wear her high tops. No one will be the wiser. "El called, she wants to hang out and I don't know what to do, I'm kinda freaking out."

"And you called me?"

Mike rolls her eyes, knowing that even though Will can't see her he'll get the message. Perks of being best friends.

"Duh," she says. "We're all inexperienced dweebs, but at least you're not a total dick. Which jacket?"

"Uh... Do you remember what she was wearing today?"

"Black jeans, black boots, the blue and brown flannel, and that black jacket, you know, the one with the patches on the elbows?"

"Right." It occurs to Mike that maybe she rattled off that list a little too easily, but Will doesn't comment on it, like the good best friend he is. "Okay, the denim bomber then, since you won't match."

"Good call."

As Mike is digging through her closet, Will asks casually, "So, what are you guys gonna do?"

"Shit."

"What?"

Mike flops back on the carpet. "I have no clue."

"Oh. Well, I'm sure it'll be fine." She can tell Will is trying to be reassuring, but she's already semi-catatonic with panic. "There's not a lot of things to do in Hawkins. You'll probably just bike around or go to the arcade or something."

"Thanks, Will the Wiseass." She pulls on the jacket and her shoes before standing in front of the mirror again. Not too bad. "I'll come by after, okay?"

"Sure. Good luck," he says, and Mike is about to hang up the phone when he adds, "Knock her dead."

"Yeah, sure." Mike rolls her eyes again. "I'll try not to murder my date."

They're both silent for a second as she realizes what she said. Is it a date? It can't be. Can it? Shit.

"See you later," she says, and when Will says goodbye she stares at herself in the mirror for a second longer. Not too bad. The jeans says casual, but the jacket says a little nice. She pulls the cuffs of her sweatshirt out a little further from inside her jacket sleeves. Yeah, good.

Mike takes the stairs two at a time and as she passes the kitchen her mom sticks her head out around the corner.

"And where do you think you're going?"

"Out!"

"Mike—!"

She's out the door before her mom can finish the sentence and doesn't stop until she's two blocks away from the corner where they're supposed to meet. She pauses to flatten her hair as best she can and straighten her jacket before continuing the last leg of the journey at a more relaxed pace.

El is already waiting by the time Mike arrives, headphones on and staring down the other end of the street. She and her bike are leaning up against the telephone pole that her boots tap against to the beat of whatever she's listening to. Her hair is shorter than it was earlier at school, freshly shorn curls that much closer to her skull, but she's wearing the same clothes so thankfully Will's plan worked and they aren't matching.

She's also wearing fingerless gloves. Fuck, she's cool. Why is Mike here again?

"Hi!" When Mike slows to a stop she removes her headphones. "What are you listening to?"

"Sonic Youth."

"Oh!" Mike has no idea who that is. "Cool, yeah, I love them."

El nods and gets back on her own bike. "Follow me."

"Uh, okay?"

They weave back through the neighborhood, past all the houses and the schools and into the woods. El stays just enough ahead to make conversation awkward, as much as Mike tries, so the pair of them silently ride through the trees.

Eventually the path they're on disappears and El hops off her bike. Mike pulls up alongside her and follows suit, and they walk their bikes through the crunching leaves and barren trees. El seems to be totally at ease in silence, but Mike is antsy not knowing what to do.

"I like your jacket," she tries, when it becomes apparent that they'll be walking for a bit.

"Thank you." El circumvents a particularly large tree root with ease. "It was my dad's, but I took it."

"It suits you."

El smiles slightly before looking back down at the ground to avoid a big rock. Mike doesn't quite trip over her feet, but it's close. She's only seen El smile three times ever but she's grown addicted to the sight and takes every chance she gets. This is the fourth, and the first just for Mike, and it's a lot to take in.

It's so much to take in, in fact, that Mike almost walks right into El's back when she finally stops.

"Whoa."

They're at the edge of a clearing in which sits an old wood cabin. Stout amidst piles of fallen leaves, the only thing that keeps it from looking like a Robert Frost poem is that there's no curl of smoke wafting lazily from the chimney. Mike's lived here all her life, trekked through these woods with Will and Dustin and Lucas every summer, and never seen this place before. The fact that El knows it's here makes Mike both a little jealous and even more curious.

"This is so cool," Mike continues. "I didn't even know this was out here."

"It's my dad's."

"Cool." Mike can just imagine them out here, El and Chief Hopper, making pancakes and hunting squirrels and making snowmen and sitting around a roaring fireplace. She suddenly feels the need to go inside, to see the inner workings of El's life, to know everything. "Can we go in?"

"It's locked."

El leans her bike against the porch and heads towards the back, leaves crunching under her assured footsteps. When Mike doesn't immediately follow her, she stops and turns back. Her hair is a fuzzy halo around her head and she looks literally out of this world.

"I want to show you something."

Ignoring the way her heart skips at least one beat, Mike nods. "Okay, sure."

Behind the cabin is a little clearing, the edges ill-defined as the fallen leaves cover the forest floor. There's a woodshed a little further ahead, but the main defining feature is the squat tree a few feet from the back porch of the cabin.

El heads straight for it and begins climbing. Her feet find invisible nooks and crannies like it's second nature, and she's clambered up several feet before turning back to Mike again. Mike, who is still on the ground.

"I, uh... I've never climbed a tree."

"Not with your friends?" El looks genuinely curious, so Mike shakes her head and says more than she means to.

"We were more indoors kids. Y'know, explorers, I guess, but grounded ones." She sticks her hands deep in her pockets and tries not to look too sheepish. "Not the most athletic, as you can probably tell."

"Here." El is back on the ground almost immediately and dragging Mike over by the sleeve before she can realize what's happening. "Put your left foot here."

Mike follows El's instructions through a detached haze caused by the noticeable warmth of El standing so close to her. She smells like the special shampoo they have at the hairdresser's, faint old man cologne, wool, and what Mike can only describe as El. When Mike puts her hand on one of the knots El points to, she's just quick enough that the side of her hand brushes El's finger, and it's like an electric shock.

Honestly, it's a miracle she doesn't die before her feet even leave the ground.

Once Mike is situated, El is quick to follow, and they just sit there watching the trees for a moment. The sun has come out in what seems to be a last reminder that it exists before winter starts and most of the birds are still around, twittering in the trees. Mike watches a squirrel clamber up the birdfeeder. It claws at the opening and manages to get out a few seeds before an acorn lands on the little tray and startles.

As the squirrel scampers deeper into the woods, El laughs very quietly and Mike's head turns so fast it almost falls off. Mike catches herself, but unfortunately El notices and looks back almost as quickly, and they end up staring at each other awkwardly.

"...Do you want a Snickers?"

El blinks, clearly surprised, but nods as Mike fumbles around in her pockets. They're in here somewhere...

She leans back against the trunk to avoid falling and finally excavates a handful of fun sized candy. "I stole some of my sister's Halloween

candy."

"Wait." El leans over, close, really close, Mike can't breathe, and reaches up into Mike's hair. She pulls out a bright red leaf and stares at it intently before looking back to Mike. "There."

"Oh." Mike takes a second to refill her lungs, then weakly says, "Thanks."

They chew their chocolates for a moment before Mike stupidly breaks the silence to make awkward small talk. "I bet that doesn't happen to you much."

"What?"

"The leaves in the...? Because you have such short hair? It looks nice, by the way."

"Thank you." El eats the rest of her chocolate and swallows before continuing, "I like my hair. I used to have it even shorter when I was little."

It might be the longest sentence she's ever heard El say, and if Mike thought she got heart palpitations at her voice before, she's going into cardiac arrest now.

"Really? How short?"

"Buzz cut."

"Wow, that's... super cool."

El nods but stares quietly at the ground. "I was sick a lot as a kid."

"Oh." Mike doesn't quite know what to say to that, as *the thought of anything happening to you makes me feel wrong* probably crosses a line. "I'm sorry."

"That's what most people say."

Mike stares down at her fingers and rubs them. They're sticky with caramel and bits of tree gunk are stuck where she'd reflexively

grabbed the branch when she shifted awkwardly just a little too much. She looks up after a moment to say something (although she doesn't know what) and loses her breath when she finds El already looking.

"El...?"

In answer, El kisses her. It's blink-and-you-miss-it quick, so it's a good thing Mike can't blink. Or breathe. Or do anything, really, other than watch as El leans forward and forward and then makes contact, and then retreats. The second time, though, Mike goes through an internal system reboot enough to close her eyes and kiss back. Baby steps.

For a moment, that's all that happens. Mike holds onto the branch beneath her as tightly as possible, both her to keep her from falling off and to keep her from grabbing El or something, she doesn't really know. The fall air is chilly especially this high up, but Mike can't feel it at all. All she can feel is El's lips on hers, smell her shampoo, hear her breathing.

She tastes like peppermint chapstick.

Suddenly, though, just when Mike is starting to wonder if she should start doing something else, El pulls away.

"What time is it?"

"Uh..." Mike glances at her calculator watch in a daze and reads without comprehending. "Five thirty?"

"I have to go now."

Mike watches blankly until she reaches the ground, at which point the clouds around her head dissipate and she comes back to Earth. "Wait..." She scrambles carefully down the trunk to join El in returning to their bikes.

"I have to go," El says. "My dad said I have to be home by dinner."

"Okay."

They walk back out of the woods again mostly in silence, although Mike doesn't really notice this time. She can't stop thinking about how El kissed her? Like, on the lips? Oh just wait until she tells Will, he's gonna flip.

By the time they make it back to the main road, Mike has started to come back to reality, and worry as well. El leads them back to the corner they had started at even though it means she'll have to backtrack to get home and Mike takes it as a good sign but still doesn't know what is supposed to happen next.

"I guess I'll see you at school tomorrow?" Mike asks once they roll to a stop. She can't stop worrying the grips on her handlebars but concentrates all her energy on not fumbling her words. "Since it's Friday and all..."

"Yes." El looks just as awkward now, kicking her foot out to scrape against the pavement. Mike's pretty sure that's another good sign.

After a second more of awkwardness, Mike blurts out, "Thank you for showing me." After another half a second, "I mean, thank you for showing me your cabin. That was super cool."

"Thank you for climbing a tree with me." El smiles and rolls her bike forward a little so their front tires bump. "You were very good."

Mike is definitely for sure blushing now, more than could be reasonably explained by the cold weather. "You were a good teacher."

El smiles again, doubling Mike's total El smile count in just one afternoon. Mike is committing these to memory, hoarding smiles like Superman probably hoards kryptonite so no one can use it against him. One day she's going to get a smile with teeth, and then she'll be completely unstoppable.

She's so busy imaging what El properly grinning would look like that she nearly misses it when El leans up and over their bike handles to kiss her on the cheek. Again she's gone in a flash, this time rolling away enough to get her feet on the pedals, and Mike blushes further when she sees El's inability to make eye contact matches hers.

"See you tomorrow, Mike," El says as she turns her bike around in a wide circle.

"Yeah." Mike grins even wider, if that's at all possible. "See you tomorrow, El."

Alone in the empty cul-de-sac, Mike takes a second for herself before speeding gleefully towards the Byers house. This afternoon was the most quintessential teen romance bullshit ever— Well, the guys are never gonna believe this. Mike herself barely can. But it's real.

Mike takes her feet off the pedals as she coasts down a hill. Just like a goddamn movie.

Author's Note:

mike blackmails her parents into giving her her own dedicated line by threatening to drop out and move to california to design video games. they only do it because she totally would. and also nancy's off at college and isn't using hers anymore

title from "[i drove all night](#)" by cyndi lauper (cheesy cheesy and also a lil anachronistic ik) bc i wrote in my own cyndi lauper reference before realizing that the note on the comic also mentioned cyndi lauper.

anyway, hope i didn't butcher anyone's character too badly. anything that sounds ooc well uh suspend your disbelief, idk, they're teenagers now, people change

tumblr @[lamphous](#)